

# 2017 Western Balkans Summit – stepping up regional cooperation to advance on the European Union path

The 2017 Western Balkans Summit will take place on 12 July in Trieste, Italy. The Summit will serve as an important occasion to work together on strengthening concrete opportunities while fostering regional cooperation with the aim of developing inclusive societies, good governance and vibrant economies, hence also further advancing the European Union integration perspective of the region.

Federica **Mogherini**, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Johannes **Hahn** Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, and Violeta **Bulc**, Commissioner for Transport, will participate together with Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers, Ministers of Economy and Ministers of Transport of the Western Balkans and their counterparts from 6 EU Member States (Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia).

Discussions will focus on three key areas of regional cooperation: 1) Connectivity, 2) Regional economic integration/private sector development and 3) People-to-people contacts.

- In the area of connectivity, focus will be on the implementation of the Connectivity Agenda, which aims at creating conditions for economic growth and good neighbourly relations, in particular through the preparation and financing of concrete regional infrastructure investment projects in the transport and energy sectors. During the Summit, the European Commission will announce substantial new funding as part of its annual 'connectivity package'. Moreover, the Western Balkans partners are expected to sign the Transport Community Treaty, which will help integrate the transport networks in the region and with the EU and guide related reform measures in the transport sector.
- On regional economic integration, the Western Balkan partners are expected to agree on an action plan to develop a Regional Economic Area aimed at boosting the attractiveness of the region to encourage investment and generate jobs, especially through smart growth, start-ups and scale-ups. For the first time within the Berlin process, a digital dimension is part of the action plan: this will contribute to integrating the region into the pan-European digital market. The Chamber Investment Forum of the Western Balkans, which gathers chambers of commerce of the region, will inaugurate its Permanent Secretariat in Trieste at the margin of the Summit: the involvement of the business community will contribute to translating the Regional Economic Area into concrete opportunities for companies in the region. On private sector development, the Commission will step up its substantial existing support to SMEs through a new contribution to the Western Balkans Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility, as well as pushing for

more dynamic inward investment.

- Regarding people-to-people contacts, the European Commission together with the Italian Government is organising an [EU-Western Balkans Youth forum](#) in the margins of the Summit to take stock of the results achieved since last year and explore further areas of cooperation. The conclusions of the youth forum will be presented at the Summit. The forum and the Summit will also serve to promote participation in the Erasmus exchange programme, which is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and has been successfully extended to the Western Balkans. Based on the outcomes of the youth forum, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) will further develop its work programme to foster cooperation among young people of the region. During the Summit, political leaders are further expected to reconfirm their commitment to an exchange scheme for young civil servants from the region, which was launched at last year's Western Balkans Summit in Paris and has shown very positive results. Italy is hosting the fourth annual Summit in the framework of the "Berlin Process", an initiative for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, which follows the Summits in Berlin (2014), Vienna (2015) and Paris (2016).

**For more information:**

[Factsheet: EU Engagement in the Western Balkans](#)

[2017 Trieste Summit on the Western Balkans](#)

[EU-Western Balkans Youth forum](#)

[Civil Society Forum Trieste 2017](#)

[Western Balkans – European External Action Service](#)

[Directorate General: European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations](#)

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